

# Board weighs plant cleanup alternatives

Sep 16, 2013 |

Advisory board officials plan to convene today with environmental representatives to discuss all available steps forward in the future cleanup of the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant site, including keeping plant waste local.

Members of the Paducah Citizens Advisory Board met on Friday and Saturday to review proposed plant recycling projects ahead of a scheduled educational meeting with Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy and state resource officials today at the board office.

Ralph Young, outgoing CAB chairman, said the two-day session did not yield any specific recommendations on recycling. The board, however, discussed moving forward with talks involving a Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA)-regulated on-site waste cell or landfill.

The local waste cell could potentially save the DOE money by keeping plant waste at the current site, as opposed to relocating the material to another location on the West Coast. “That’s a decision that’s pending right now: Do we spend all that money shipping waste across the country, or is that money that could be spent here cleaning up the site?” Young said.

“But that decision is still a little ways away.”

The United States Enrichment Corporation announced its shutdown of uranium conversion operations at the Paducah site in May, with the first round of substantial layoffs occurring on Aug. 16. About 160 workers had either quit, retired or been laid off through August, with another 100 expected to be cut in October.

Heading into today’s meeting, the advisory board looks to express community pressures to the incoming officials in hopes of getting agencies to look long term, and discuss plans that would help repurpose the site.

“These guys are all focused on regulatory guidelines, and now the game has changed where we want to reuse this site and recover these jobs,” Young said.

Chad Chancellor, Paducah Economic Development president, said the move to create a waste cell wouldn’t necessarily mean job creation on part of the DOE, but it would be a point that he would insist upon. Chancellor declined to say if there were any potential suitors looking into the plant site.

The DOE has yet to respond to formal business proposals for the site, in the form of request for offers (RFOs), to repurpose or possibly employ some of the plant’s laid-off workers, and the agency has until the end of November.

Mayor Gayle Kaler approached the waste cell idea cautiously — citing concerns for environmental impact in the event of catastrophic events such as an earthquake — and said she wasn’t fully convinced from reviewing existing engineering studies.

Should agencies approve the waste cell project, Kaler said she wasn’t optimistic that many jobs would be created, save for the building of any initial structure.

“This all must be weighed against what the community wants,” she said.